

***INTERNATIONAL SECURITY / MIDDLE EAST UPDATE***  
***April 2 - 9, 2014***

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**1. Hagel, China's Defense Minister Build Military Relations Model (04-08-2014)**

By Cheryl Pellerin  
American Forces Press Service

BEIJING, April 8, 2014 – At the invitation of Chinese Defense Minister Gen. Chang Wanquan, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel visited the Chinese Defense Ministry's headquarters here today.

Hagel met with Chang and then a larger group of defense officials before he and Chang revealed during a news conference a new model for U.S.-China military-to-military relations.

The secretary's visit to Beijing comes in the middle of a 10-day trip to the Asia-Pacific region, during which he visited Japan and will travel to Mongolia later this week. The trip began in Hawaii with the first meeting for defense ministers of the 10 member countries of the Association for Southeast Asian Nations to be held in the United States.

"One focus of our discussion today was how we develop a new model of military-to-military relations," Hagel said about his meeting with Chang. "We've just finished a very good meeting," the secretary added, "during which I restated that the United States is committed to continuing to build a constructive and productive relationship with China."

Hagel explained that the United States believes its approach should be to build a sustained and substantive dialogue, deepen practical cooperation in areas of common interest, and manage competition and differences through openness and communication.

In each area, he added, there is much work to do, but the nations are making strong progress.

“As General Chang announced, we agreed today on several new ways to improve our military-to-military relationship,” Hagel said. First, the U.S. and Chinese defense agencies will establish an army-to-army dialogue as an institutionalized mechanism within the framework of the U.S.-China military-to-military relationship.

Second, the secretary added, “we agreed to participate in a joint military-medical cooperative activity. This will build on experiences gained at the 2014 Rim of the Pacific exercise, a U.S.-hosted multilateral naval exercise that China will participate in for the first time this summer.”

Third, Hagel said, the defense agencies will establish an Asia-Pacific security dialogue between the assistant secretary of defense for Asia-Pacific security affairs and the director of the Chinese Defense Ministry’s foreign affairs office to exchange views on a range of security issues.

“This dialogue will build on the discussions Gen. Chong and I had today on regional security issues,” the secretary said, “including North Korea and the growing threat posed by its nuclear and missile programs.”

Hagel added that continued instability in Northeast Asia is not in China’s interest, and that the United States is deeply concerned about the threat North Korea poses to U.S. treaty allies and, increasingly, to the homeland.

“The United States and China have a shared interest in achieving a verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula,” he said.

Hagel and Chang also discussed tensions in the East and South China seas.

“I underscored that all parties should refrain from provocative actions and the use of intimidation, coercion or aggression to advance their claims,” the secretary said. “Such disputes must be resolved peacefully and in accordance with international law.”

Hagel noted that yesterday he toured China’s aircraft carrier, met personnel aboard the ship and had an opportunity to listen. He will later speak to officers at the National Defense University and is looking forward to visiting with noncommissioned officers, whom he characterized as the backbone of all militaries.

“Exchanges like this at every level of command are critical for building mutual understanding and also respect, Hagel said. “Our vision is a future where our militaries can work closely together on a range of challenges, such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions.”

To reach this objective, the secretary said, “we must be candid about issues we disagree about, but also continue to deepen our cooperation in areas where we do agree. We have many common interests, and we agree on many things.”

Regarding cybersecurity, Hagel emphasized the need for the United States and China to be more open about each other's capabilities and intentions in this critically important domain.

"Greater openness about cyber reduces the risk that misunderstanding and misperception could lead to miscalculation," he said. "More transparency will strengthen China-U.S. relations."

The U.S.-China relationship is important for stability and security in the Asia-Pacific, and for achieving prosperity for both nations in the 21st century, the secretary added.

"As President Barack Obama has said," Hagel noted, "the United States welcomes the rise of a stable, peaceful and prosperous China."

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## **[2. Kerry Warns Russia to Stop Separatist Actions in Eastern Ukraine \(04-08-2014\)](#)**

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.  
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State John Kerry warned Russia to end its separatist actions in eastern Ukraine or face tough new economic sanctions.

In congressional testimony, Kerry said the United States and its allies are willing to impose severe new sanctions on Russia against key economic sectors like energy, banking and mining. President Obama has signed an executive order to implement these measures if Russia does not stop exerting pressure and aggression against eastern Ukraine, he said.

"What we see from Russia is an illegal and illegitimate effort to destabilize a sovereign state and create a contrived crisis with paid operatives across an international boundary engaged in this initiative," Kerry testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on April 8.

"No one should be fooled — and believe me, no one is fooled by what could potentially be a contrived pretext for military intervention just as we saw in Crimea," Kerry added.

Kerry said Russian agents have been the catalysts behind substantial chaos in the previous 48 hours in which pro-Russian demonstrators seized government buildings in Kharkiv, Donetsk and Lugansk and other cities in the region. Since then Ukrainian Interior Ministry forces have retaken many of the seized buildings and driven out the pro-Russian demonstrators in Kharkiv and in Donetsk, according to Ukrainian Interior Minister Arsen Avakov.

Kerry told senators he is meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Ukrainian officials and the European Union in Europe during the week of April 20. Kerry spoke with Lavrov by

telephone April 7, and “he made clear that any further Russian effort to destabilize Ukraine will incur further costs for Russia,” State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said.

Finding a diplomatic resolution to the crisis and reducing tensions has been the Obama administration’s primary objective, Kerry added.

“But Russia should not, for a single solitary second, mistake the expression of that preference as an unwillingness to do what is necessary to stop any violation of the international order,” Kerry told senators.

The United States imposed sanctions March 20 that targeted 20 individuals inside and outside the Russian government and a private Russian bank, Bank Rossiya, because of their involvement in or direct support of the Crimean crisis. That round of penalties followed the first sanctions levied March 17 against 11 high-ranking Russian and Crimean officials.

The Senate committee reviewed U.S. foreign policies broadly during a hearing to review the annual 2015 State Department budget request. The department is seeking \$50.1 billion for the department, the U.S. Agency for International Development and overseas contingency operations, a funding level equal to its 2014 budget. Kerry also addressed senators’ questions about policies on Syria, the Palestinian-Israeli talks, and Iran’s nuclear weapons development program.

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### **3. Hagel Visits Chinese Aircraft Carrier Liaoning (04-07-2014)**

By Cheryl Pellerin  
American Forces Press Service

QINGDAO, China, April 7, 2014 – On Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel’s first official visit to China, the Peoples’ Liberation Army allowed him, in response to a request made in January, to become the first foreign visitor to tour the sleek refitted Russian aircraft carrier -- the PLA’s first -- called Liaoning.

China is Hagel’s third stop after multiday meetings in Hawaii and Japan on his fourth trip to the Asia-Pacific region since becoming defense secretary. After a day of meetings here tomorrow, Hagel will stop in Mongolia to meet with government and military leaders there before starting home April 10.

Liaoning is moored at Yuchi Naval Base in its home port of Qingdao in east China’s Shandong province.

"The secretary was very pleased with his visit today aboard the carrier Liaoning," Pentagon Press Secretary Navy Rear Adm. John Kirby said in a statement.

Hagel understood the significance of the PLA’s granting of his request for the tour, Kirby added, and the secretary was impressed by the professionalism of the ship’s officers and crew.

“He hopes today’s visit is a harbinger of other opportunities to improve our military-to-military dialogue and transparency,” the press secretary said.

A defense official traveling with the secretary described the ship's tour as lasting about two hours, beginning with a briefing about the ship, its capabilities and operating schedule conducted by the two-star strike carrier group commander and the ship's commanding officer, Capt. Zhang Zheng.

The briefers were good, and they invited and encouraged questions, the official said. Hagel and his guest, U.S. Ambassador to China Max Baucus, and others on the tour all asked questions, the official added.

"The briefing lasted about 30 minutes, and then we saw medical facilities on the ship, some of the living quarters, the flight control station where they control flight operations, the pilot house, and the bridge, where they drive the ship," the defense official said.

The secretary and his group also took a walking tour of the flight deck and saw launch stations and helicopter recovery stations as well arresting cables, "and got a briefing on how what we call in the U.S. Navy the 'landing signals officers' guide the aircraft in for an arrested landing on the flight deck," the official explained.

He said the ship was extraordinarily clean, and the crew was sharp and informative.

"Every sailor at every station where Hagel stopped for the tour knew exactly what their job was, and how important their job was, and exactly how to explain it to the secretary," the official said.

Hagel had a lot of give-and-take discussions with the crew throughout the tour, and talked to them just as he talks to U.S. troops when he goes out to visit them, the defense official added.

"The tour ended with a stop in the officers' dining area, where Hagel had a chance to sit down with junior officers, have some refreshments and just talk to them," the official said. "We all did. I sat down at a table with two junior female officers, and everybody did the same thing."

The crew members were very impressive and very dedicated, he observed.

"It's a new capability they're trying to develop, and I think they all appreciate the importance of it to the PLA, but also the difficulty of it," the official said. "On more than one occasion, the officers who were with us said quite frankly they know they have a long way to go in naval aviation. It is a difficult military capability to develop and to perfect, ... and they expressed that they believe they can still learn much from us in terms of how to get better at it."

The ship has three launching stations for jet aircraft, four arresting wires, a complement of about 1,500 sailors, one sixth of whom are officers, and there were 90 women in the crew, both officers and enlisted service members, the defense official said.

Liaoning has been out on sea trials almost 20 times, and officials know they still have to do more, he added.

Compared with U.S. aircraft carriers, Laioning isn't as big or fast, and it doesn't carry as many aircraft or as many types of aircraft, the official said, but it's a real aircraft carrier, capable of launching and recovering jet combat aircraft.

"We asked them when they would have an operational naval air wing on the ship, and the captain said there's no timeline for that right now," the official said. "They aren't at the state where they're declaring that sort of operational readiness."

The defense official said the opportunity for Hagel and his group to tour the aircraft carrier today was a significant step in China's attempts to be transparent and open.

"I would say that as this trip to Beijing begins for the secretary, today was a good first step in terms of trying to develop more openness and transparency," the defense official said.

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#### **[4. Election Day 'Historic' for Afghanistan, Official Says \(04-07-2014\)](#)**

By Claudette Roulo

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 7, 2014 – With International Security Assistance Force support available, but largely unneeded, millions of Afghan citizens voted April 5 under the umbrella of protection provided by Afghan security forces, Pentagon spokesman Army Col. Steve Warren said today.

"As far as I'm concerned, April 5, 2014, is an historic day in Afghanistan. ... This was a great accomplishment, and it's a testament to how far the Afghan national security forces have come," Warren said.

ISAF troops served in an advisory capacity and made available certain types of air support and medical evacuation capabilities, the colonel said, but those capabilities went largely unused. The elections were a great success for the Afghan security forces, he added.

"It certainly should give confidence to all of Afghanistan that their national security forces are capable, they're trained, and they are willing to do what needs to be done to keep Afghans safe," Warren said.

"We are very proud of them," he added. "And we're very proud of the millions of Afghan citizens who chose to have their voices heard."

Once the ballots are counted, Afghanistan's new president will have to decide whether to sign the bilateral security agreement negotiated between the United States and Afghanistan. The Defense Department looks forward to working with a willing partner on decisions regarding the post-2014 presence of American forces, the colonel said.

"We will encourage ... any government leaders that emerge from this election process to quickly engage with us and sign this bilateral security agreement promptly, so that we can move into planning for post-2014," Warren said.

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## **5. Hagel: U.S.-Japan Partnership Critical to Regional Security (04-05-2014)**

By Cheryl Pellerin  
American Forces Press Service

TOKYO, April 5, 2014 – Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel landed in Japan today as part of his fourth official trip to the Asia-Pacific region to reassure the nation's leaders that the U.S.-Japan relationship is one of America's strongest partnerships, friendships and treaty relationships.

This evening Hagel met with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. According to Pentagon Press Secretary Navy Rear Adm. John Kirby, the secretary thanked Abe for his leadership and for helping the two militaries maintain a strong relationship.

Hagel expressed his firm commitment to the U.S.-Japan treaty of mutual cooperation and security and to working closely with the leadership of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces to improve the nations' collective capabilities, Kirby said.

The leaders discussed a range of regional security issues, including recent provocations by North Korea, Chinese maritime claims and military activities, and the need for a continued focus on dialogue and cooperation among the United States, Japan and South Korea.

Hagel affirmed strong U.S. support for Japanese efforts at defense reform and thanked Abe for supporting the Japanese government last December in securing a landfill permit for the Futenma replacement facility.

Tomorrow, Hagel will meet with Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera, Foreign Affairs Minister Fumio Kishida and U.S. Ambassador to Japan Caroline Kennedy.

"There are challenges in this part of the world that include Japan's future," the defense secretary told reporters traveling with him.

"I'm visiting Japan ... not just to reconnect and recommit U.S. efforts but to build on the recent meeting President {Barack} Obama had with Prime Minister Abe and South Korean President Park [Geun-hye]," Hagel said, "as we look at new opportunities and challenges in this part of the world."

He added, "The Japanese-American partnership is a very critical anchor to peace and stability and security in this part of the world, so I look forward to conversations here in the next couple of days with the senior leaders of Japan."

Even before he landed in Tokyo, Hagel initiated and hosted in Honolulu an informal meeting of defense ministers of the 10 countries that make up the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN. The meeting was the first ever held in the United States.

"The ASEAN defense ministers conference was an important first step in what I'm doing here in the region because it represented the initial effort we have been working on as we continue to collaborate and coordinate with and strengthen our relationships in the Asia-Pacific," Hagel said.

As President Barack Obama, Secretary of State John F. Kerry and Hagel himself have said many times, ASEAN is an important organization now and will continue to be important, the secretary said, because it represents the collective interests of the region.

ASEAN member countries are Burma, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

“When you add to this the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting-Plus members which consists of the 10 ASEAN defense ministers and defense ministers from the United States, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, India, New Zealand and Russia ... that’s a significant representation of this part of the world,” Hagel observed.

The U.S. strategy of rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific region “is very much based on these relationships and all their variances and dimensions,” the secretary said, “so to start his fourth trip to the region in less than 12 months spending a couple of days with ASEAN members was important.”

Hagel landed here today at Yokota Air Base, whose host unit is the 374th Airlift Wing, and his first visit was with 200 U.S. service members and Japanese Self-Defense Forces troops.

In a hangar on a stage in front of giant flags of the United States and Japan, the secretary brought greetings from President Obama and thanked those from U.S. Forces Japan and their families for their service and sacrifice.

Hagel also thanked those from Japan’s Self-Defense Forces “for what you do for your country and for our partnership, and for helping keep peace and stability in this part of the world.”

In Hagel’s discussions with Japanese leaders, a senior defense official traveling with the secretary said Hagel will have an opportunity to maintain the positive forward motion initiated in Tokyo last fall during the historic Two Plus Two meeting he attended with Kerry.

That progress, the official said, involved work on the bilateral U.S.-Japan alliance to revise the defense guidelines, move forward with the realignment of U.S. military forces in Japan, and strengthen and orient the alliance to focus on 21st century challenges.

Hagel and the Japanese leaders also will discuss building a common understanding of the regional and global security environment.

“Here the secretary will ... share perspectives with the Japanese prime minister and defense minister on what they’re seeing on the Korean Peninsula, in the East China Sea and in the South China Sea,” the official said, and conduct important alliance consultations on opportunities and challenges of the international security order.

The senior defense official said Hagel and Japanese officials also would discuss Japan’s relationships with other countries in the region.

“The president and Prime Minister Abe and South Korean President Park had a historic trilateral summit on the sidelines of the Nuclear Security Summit at the Hague recently,” the official said, “and there will be an opportunity to continue underscoring the importance ... we see in greater trilateral cooperation among the United States, Japan and South Korea, and the United States, Japan and Australia, and how to move those relationships forward.”



In Washington on April 17-18 the United States, South Korea and Japan will hold a sixth round of Defense Trilateral Talks, the official said, and in late April President Obama will visit Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Malaysia.

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[Hagel Meets With Japanese Prime Minister in Japan](#)

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## **6. U.S.-ASEAN Forum Deepens Partnerships, Increases Opportunities (04-03-2014)**

By Cheryl Pellerin

American Forces Press Service

HONOLULU, April 3, 2014 – Success during the first U.S.-ASEAN Defense Forum held in the United States has strengthened friendships among nations and increased partnership opportunities that will help everyone in the region deal with new and enduring Asia-Pacific security challenges, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said here today.

The 10 defense ministers of member countries that constitute the Association of Southeast Asian Nations accepted Hagel's June invitation and participated in the discussions and roundtables with purpose and energy, the secretary said during the forum's final news conference.

"This gathering was an important milestone in America's growing engagement with the ASEAN nations, and another signal of the important role ASEAN has to play in promoting regional stability and prosperity," Hagel observed.

The Defense Department hosted the meeting, but the forum benefited from the participation of partners across the federal government, the secretary added, especially during yesterday's session on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations hosted by Dr. Kathryn Sullivan, administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or NOAA, and moderated by Dr. Rajiv Shah, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID.

"Coming only hours after a tsunami advisory was lifted for Hawaii, the NOAA presentation and roundtable underscored that natural disasters and humanitarian crises will define 21st century security challenges, not only for Southeast Asia, but for the world," Hagel said.

"We can expect that the frequency and the complexity of disaster relief and humanitarian assistance missions will increase," he noted, adding that such missions demand cooperation among nations and across their government agencies, nongovernmental organizations and their private sectors.

“The discussions we had yesterday, which focused on lessons learned from recent operations, will help identify new proposals to improve our preparedness and cooperation in the future,” he told reporters.

In discussions yesterday, for example, Singapore proposed using Changi Naval Base as a regional humanitarian assistance and disaster relief crisis coordination center.

“This could be an important venue for nations in the region to coordinate military responses to disasters, and it's an idea that we're going to pursue,” the secretary said. “This was among many ideas that came out of our last couple of days of discussions.”

Discussions today addressed a range of regional security matters, including improving maritime security cooperation and addressing tensions in the South China Sea, Hagel said.

“I told the ministers that the United States is increasingly concerned about the instability arising from territorial disputes in the South China Sea,” he added. “The rights of all nations must be respected. It's important that all claimants avoid the use or threat of force or intimidation or coercion.”

He said the United States urges all claimants of land in the disputes to clarify their claims, including the basis of the claims in international law, and to use internationally accepted rules and standards of behavior.

Tomorrow, the secretary said, he will continue the rest of his fourth official visit to the Asia-Pacific region, including stops in Japan, China and Mongolia.

“This trip and the ASEAN-U.S. Forum shows America's rebalance to the Asia-Pacific remains a critical part of our national security strategy,” Hagel said. “We are committed to the security and the prosperity of the region because of our interests, and also because of our close relationships, alliances and commitments.”

He added, “America has a long-standing engagement and commitment with the Asia-Pacific region. It's a commitment that we will continue to meet in the 21st century.”

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## **[7. Kerry Says Crimean Crisis is Wake-Up Call for NATO \(04-02-2014\)](#)**

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.  
Staff Writer

Washington — Calling the Crimean crisis a wake-up call, Secretary of State John Kerry says Russia's recent actions in Ukraine underscore that the NATO alliance takes seriously any country's attempt to change the borders of Europe by the use of military force.

NATO is facing one of its toughest challenges from Russia since the end of the Cold War in the 1990s.

Russia's actions were denounced by the U.N. General Assembly, the European Union, the Organization for Security Co-operation in Europe, the Group of Seven advanced economies and the United States. Russia carried out a military intervention into the Crimean region of Ukraine in late February and then attempted to annex the region in March following a disputed referendum and without the consent of the Ukrainian government.

NATO foreign ministers meeting in Brussels on April 1 announced that the alliance will "suspend all practical civilian and military cooperation between NATO and Russia." Any talks within the NATO-Russia Council, created to lessen tensions between the two former Cold War foes, would be made at the ambassadorial level.

The foreign ministers also agreed to review NATO's relations with Russia at their next meeting in June. NATO is holding a summit, hosted by the United Kingdom, in South Wales in September.

At a press briefing following the ministers' meeting, Kerry told journalists that as Europe and the United States stand together in defense of Ukraine's right to choose its future and in defense of international law, they reject any notion that Russia's actions are legal.

In recent weeks, the United States augmented NATO's Baltic air policing mission with six additional F-16 fighter jets and deployed 12 F-16s to Poland, Kerry said. The guided missile destroyer USS Truxtun was in the Black Sea for a naval exercise with NATO allies Romania and Bulgaria, but has rotated out. Kerry added that "more support is on the way," and another U.S. naval ship is expected in the Black Sea.

While meeting at The Hague, Netherlands, in late March, the G7 major economies — the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan — canceled plans to attend the G8 summit set for Sochi, Russia, on the Black Sea and will meet instead in Brussels. The G8 is the G7 countries plus Russia.

Before a speech in Brussels March 26, President Obama met with NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and pledged extensive new measures to bolster NATO forces in Europe, as well as NATO allies and partners. Obama also reaffirmed that the American commitment to come to the defense of NATO allies under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty is absolute and unwavering.

On April 2 at the EU-U.S. Energy Council meeting in Brussels, Kerry denounced efforts by Russia's state-controlled Gazprom natural gas conglomerate to increase the cost of natural gas to Ukrainians by May 1.

"It really boils down to this: No nation should use energy to stymie a people's aspirations," Kerry said. "It should not be used as a weapon. It's in the interest of all of us to be able to have adequate energy supplies critical to our economies, critical to our security, critical to the prosperity of our people. And we can't allow it to be used as a political weapon or as an instrument for aggression."

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## **8. U.S. Airmen, Aircraft Training with Polish Forces (04-02-2014)**

By Daylena S. Ricks  
Ramstein Air Base, Germany

Powidz Air Base, Poland — More than 100 U.S. Air Force airmen and three C-130J cargo aircraft from Ramstein Air Base, Germany, deployed to enhance defense ties with Polish armed forces members during a scheduled aircraft rotation to the U.S. Air Force Aviation Detachment in Poland from March 31 to April 11.

For the first time, Polish and U.S. fighter and cargo aircraft and personnel will share tactics while flying together, which will present a more complex training environment for the two NATO allies, according to Polish air force leadership.

“This training gives us new perspective, experience and challenges,” said Polish air force Colonel Mirosław Lusiarczyk, 33rd Air Base commander. “This is the first time we will fly together with both transportation and fighter aircraft, which will be a great challenge.”

The allied forces will work together to increase interoperability through various exercises, including container drops, grass-strip tactical landings and observation flights.

In addition to flying together, Polish and U.S. service members will jump together. The Polish land forces and special operations forces are able to jump from U.S. aircraft because of the presence of a joint team of U.S. jump masters. The Polish will train with U.S. Air Force paratroopers, along with a small contingent of U.S. Army paratroopers and a U.S. Navy freefall jump master, to build partnership capacity for real-world scenarios.

“With each rotation, the Aviation Detachment works to improve our processes to support the incoming U.S. armed forces unit and build a stronger partnership with the Polish armed force,” said U.S. Air Force Major Matthew Spears, the detachment commander.

These combined training rotations increase cooperation between the U.S and Polish armed forces and strengthen their interoperability as NATO allies.

“Flying together allows us to work together and that is very important to us for future cooperation,” Lusiarczyk told the U.S. personnel. “I wish you all good luck and clear skies.”

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## **9. Hagel Describes Role of Partnerships in Asia-Pacific Rebalance (04-02-2014)**

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 2, 2014 – In a world where security challenges do not adhere to political boundaries and economies are linked as never before, no nation can go it alone and hope to prosper, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel wrote in an op-ed article published yesterday on the Defense One website.

“Achieving sustained security and prosperity in the 21st century requires nations to work together and to meet common challenges with uncommon unity and purpose,” Hagel added.

The secretary noted that the response of more than 25 nations to the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 shows how that kind of unity is increasingly visible in the Asia-Pacific, which he called one of the most critical regions for global security and the global economy. And Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines led to a massive international relief and recovery effort last fall and produced Japan's largest overseas military deployment in the post-war period, Hagel wrote.

"In both cases, nations in the region were able to set aside rivalries and differences and instead work together," the secretary wrote. "At the same time, both cases underscore the reality that nations must engage in more practical security cooperation ahead of time in order to work together more effectively when challenges arise."

Deepening cooperation does not materialize on its own, Hagel wrote, but requires deliberate and sustained efforts such as those of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, to continue building a stronger regional security architecture that can address shared challenges.

These efforts have the full support of the United States and will be highlighted this week in Hawaii, at the first U.S.-hosted gathering of U.S. and ASEAN defense ministers, Hagel wrote. By hosting this meeting at the start of his fourth visit to the Asia-Pacific region -- which will include stops in Japan, China and Mongolia -- it serves to underscore the growing role ASEAN members are playing in promoting regional stability and enhanced security cooperation, he added.

The United States also has a key role to play in this endeavor, the secretary wrote.

"As a leading economic and military power in the Pacific -- one with no disputed territorial claims or ambitions in the region -- the United States is uniquely positioned to continue to help Asian nations build a vibrant regional security architecture," he explained. "My upcoming trip emphasizes three ways in which the Department of Defense will contribute to this effort."

First, the U.S. military will increase its role in cooperative security efforts and exercises as it continues to shift forces and operational focus to the Asia-Pacific region, Hagel wrote.

"It has been more than five years since President Barack Obama came to office determined to lead America's rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific, and it remains front and center in our national security strategy," he added. "The rebalance has helped to strengthen our alliances and partnerships in Asia and led to increased engagement, exercises and training on a bilateral and multilateral basis."

The deployment of advanced military capabilities to the region has also proven indispensable, Hagel wrote, noting that the U.S. contributions to the search for Flight 370 included the world's most advanced maritime patrol aircraft -- the P-8A Poseidon -- which was recently deployed to Japan.

Second, the U.S. military will continue to build new types of partnerships that tackle nontraditional security challenges more effectively, the secretary wrote. "The military presence we maintain in the Pacific -- including approximately 330,000 personnel, 180 ships, 2,000 aircraft, the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force and five Army brigades -- provides unparalleled capabilities," he wrote. "But the kind of nontraditional security challenges that pose a growing threat to stability in the region, such as climate change, natural disasters and pandemic disease, cannot be resolved through military efforts alone."

Those changes require strong partnerships across military and civilian agencies and with the private-sector and nongovernmental organizations, he added, noting that Rajiv Shah, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, is leading a session during the conference in Hawaii.

Even as the United States looks for new ways to tackle shared challenges, Hagel wrote, the U.S. military will defend its allies and consistently champion the international laws and norms that have provided the basis for regional security and prosperity for generations.

“Over the course of 10 days, I will meet with 13 defense ministers whose nations represent more than 30 percent of the global economy,” Hagel wrote. “They recognize that there can be no economic growth without stability and prosperity for their people. Continuing the positive trends in the region will depend on upholding the principles of free and open commerce, the rule of law, open access to sea lanes, air, space, and cyberspace, and resolving conflicts and disputes peacefully.

“As we have recently seen in Ukraine, threats to these principles are threats to peace and security in the 21st century,” he continued. “That’s why all nations must commit to resolving disputes peacefully, without coercion and in accordance with international law.”

For more than 60 years, Hagel wrote, the Asia-Pacific region has enjoyed relative peace and stability and become an engine for global progress and prosperity.

“The beneficiaries of this progress have been the people of the region, and that includes the American people,” he added. “The region has benefited from American leadership, and it will continue to do so. But sustaining this progress is not the work of any single nation -- it is a shared responsibility. And the more nations that embrace this responsibility and spirit of cooperation, the more confident we can be that Asia in the 21st century will be defined by security and prosperity for all its people.”

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